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POLITE LITERATURE.

An ESSAY *on* SUBLIMITY *of* WRITING. *By the Rev.* RICHARD STACK, *D. D. and M. R. I. A.*

Read 13th February, 1786.

LONGINUS, in his juſtly-admired treatiſe on the ſublime, has laid open to our view its five principal ſources: Boldneſs or vigour in the thoughts, vehement and enthuſiaſtic paſſion, invention of figures, ſplendid diction, and compoſition with dignity and elevation. Some critics before him having confounded the two firſt conſtituents, he ſhews the neceſſity of keeping them diſtinct, becauſe there are ſome paſſions, as pity, grief and fear, which are rather contrary to the ſublime: And again, there are numberleſs inſtances of ſublimity without any paſſion. Had he treated as copiouſly of the pathetic as of the reſt, he had probably given us equally intereſting and beautiful matter: But we are told he reſerved this curious ſubject for a ſeparate work. It has not, however, been left unnoticed. A great critic of our own age and country hath touched the ſubject

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with a maſterly hand. In a work of fine imagination and philoſophic enquiry he has endeavoured to prove that terror is in all caſes whatſoever, either more openly or latently, the ruling principle of the ſublime; and he inveſtigates the different qualities of objects which are moſt apt to excite terror. His theory ſeems in moſt reſpects perfectly juſt, in all its parts beautifully ingenious: But beſide its being queſtioned, whether terror be the only principle of the ſublime, he has not explained any further connection between the ſublime and the pathetic, nor ſhewn how far or in what circumſtances the expreſſions of the paſſions, with their ſeveral energies, can excite this principle, whatſoever it be.

THIS part of the ſubject then being left open to conjecture, I preſume to offer ſome reflections to the academy, not ſo much in the hope of their proving ſtrictly juſt and true, as to engage men of more critical judgment and taſte in the enquiry. If there ſhould be any truth in theſe reflections, they will ſerve as general principles to direct us in particular caſes.

ALTHOUGH it may be impoſſible to give a proper definition of the term ſublime as it relates to writing and compoſition, yet every body ſeems ſufficiently to underſtand its meaning. Whatever inſpires the mind with grand and lofty conceptions, as it were enlarges its dimenſions, and at the ſame time fills it with a ſort of delightful aſtoniſhment, is what we generally call ſublime. Let us ſee then how far ſome of the paſſions have in their natural expreſſion a tendency this way. It ſeems to me that all emotions of the ſoul, which tend to ſink its native dignity and impair its ſtrength, and which at the ſame time preſent it

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to view as eaſily yielding to their influence, without any diſplay of that vigour which might naturally be looked for, are incapable of ſublime expreſſion. When the ſoul languiſhes without any ſtruggle or exertion, it cannot be a ſubject of admiration or even reſpect, and is therefore unfit by any deſcription to excite in us grand ideas. On the other hand, if no ſuch defects are betrayed; if the paſſion predominates not through any weakneſs of reaſon or want of courage, and if it be above the controul of all natural means and reſources, its language might not be inconſiſtent with the forms of ſublimity. To apply theſe principles to the paſſion of fear: When the power that cauſes this emotion is of ſuch a nature as ought to be oppoſed and might be reſiſted with effect, the ſufferer is little better than an object of pity or contempt. In ſuch a caſe the paſſion betrays a weak and puſillanimous mind, eaſily terrified by ordinary objects and on trifling occaſions; but when it is cauſed by ſome ſuperior, reſiſtleſs, or inviſible power, the expreſſion of the paſſion is naturally connected with an idea of that power, and ſo might become a fertile ſource of the ſublime. Of this latter we have innumerable inſtances in the ſublime writings of the prophets, and one very grand and ſtriking example in the book of Job;—" In thoughts from the viſions of the night, " when deep ſleep falleth upon men, fear came upon me and " trembling, which made all my bones to ſhake. Then a ſpirit " paſſed before me; the hair of my fleſh ſtood up: It ſtood " ſtill, but I could not diſcern the form thereof." But to illuſtrate our theory ſomewhat further: This paſſion appears differently modified, and therefore ſuited to different forms of expreſſion, according to the nature of its moving principle or cauſe, its object and its degrees. If it be excited by an ordi-

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nary or trifling cauſe, if its object be mean or unworthy, or if its exceſſes be ſo great as to betray a want of all natural reſources in the mind, the paſſion is in all ſuch caſes what we uſually call fear, and is the property of a weak and abject mind. But where the cauſe that inflicts it lies above our reach, and exceeds every natural effort of the mind to cope withal, and eſpecially when under its ſcourge the mind exhibits ſigns of its native dignity and courage, ſuch a ſubject is fitted to produce our admiration, and of courſe to raiſe exalted and ſublime ideas. When, for inſtance, in the field of battle two combatants meet on equal terms, ſhould one of them ſuddenly reſign himſelf to his fears, and betake himſelf to flight, I believe the ſtrongeſt deſcription of ſuch terrors could excite no great idea, and we ſhould only feel that he was a mean and daſtardly coward: But when Macbeth ſhrinks from the ſight of Macduff, penetrated with a lively ſenſe of the wrongs which he had done him, and overwhelmed by his own guilt, it is a bold and ſublime deſcription of the power of conſcience, which can ſometimes cauſe the ſtouteſt heart to tremble. Upon the ſame account I eſteem another expreſſion of his terror to be truly ſublime, "How is't with me when every noiſe appals me." A third example I think may be taken from that celebrated paſſage of Homer, where Minerva appears flaſhing terror from her ægis upon the eyes of the Trojan warriors. I acknowledge the ſublimity of this paſſage is in a high degree owing to the grandeur of the image which it preſents; but yet the effect produced does not in the leaſt impair that ſublimity; however ſunk and bewildered and loſt to all powers of reſiſtance the objects appear, this deſcription of them rather heightens than diminiſhes the ſublime effect. I cannot ſay that I am ſo well ſatisfied with the conduct

duct of Homer in bringing about the death of Hector; in this he ſeems to ſacrifice character and probability to national vanity. The flight of this warrior degrades his character too far, and much of that glory which would be reflected on his own hero is loſt by the contrivance.

WHILE I am engaged in this part of the ſubject I muſt take the liberty of queſtioning one criticiſm of Longinus—It is upon that paſſage of Homer, where Neptune is repreſented as ſhaking all the powers of nature, and which cloſes with the image of Pluto ſtarting from his throne, and ſhouting with terror, leſt the general ſhock might diſcloſe his infernal realms to mortal ſight. Longinus beſtows full praiſe upon every thought of the paſſage except the laſt; but involves this in a general cenſure, that Homer's Gods are Men, and his Men Gods. The general obſervation is frequently too juſt, and in my opinion is partly exemplified in the inſtance which I have juſt now mentioned; Achilles there appears arrayed in terrors more than human. Yet I think the caſe now before us deſerves no cenſure. There is ſomething ſo inconceivably ſublime in the thought, that, even were it not ſtrictly conſiſtent with the laws of criticiſm, it ſhould be pronounced above the reach of art. But I think it can be vindicated. It was the genius of the Heathen Mythology to aſcribe paſſions to their Gods; ſo that great latitude was given the poet in the conduct of this machinery. Homer has certainly often violated all decorum and probability, yet the preſent occaſion does not ſeem to be one of theſe. The fabulous account of Jupiter, Neptune and Pluto having portioned out among them the univerſe according to the rank of each, prepares the mind for the watchful and jealous attention of each to his own province;

vince; ſo that any ſudden event (like the commotion excited by Neptune) which might ſeem to portend an invaſion, muſt naturally have excited an alarm, eſpecially if it aroſe from the more powerful being. The mixed emotions of terror and aſtoniſhment, ſo ſudden and momentary as they are here deſcribed, betray no defect of magnanimity or vigour, and therefore have nothing in them unfavourable to a ſublime deſcription. It appears then from the inſtances now adduced that this paſſion may aſſume the form of ſublimity or meanneſs, according to its moving principle or cauſe.

The object upon which the paſſion is employed is alſo of conſiderable influence, according as it is great and worthy and exalted, or low and mean and contracted. Suppoſe our country were invaded by a powerful enemy, againſt whom there was little hope of making a ſucceſsful ſtand; and that in this ſeaſon of public calamity, we ſhould hear a man expreſſing his fears leſt he might be involved in the general ruin which threatened: The moſt vehement pathos could excite no ideas but thoſe of contempt and diſguſt. But the noble and diſintereſted patriot, who at ſuch a criſis ſhould be ſeen alarmed and terrified, not for his own perſonal ſafety, but the ſalvation of his country, is one of the moſt glorious objects that can be preſented to our view; and the paſſion excited in ſuch a ſubject, and by ſuch an occaſion, might be uttered in language truly ſublime. The general, to whoſe good conduct the welfare of an army or a ſtate is committed, will fear to hazard an engagement, unleſs upon moſt favourable grounds, and will patiently endure to be reproached with backwardneſs and cowardice; yet the cautious conduct of ſuch a character derives dignity from its object, and might

might be exhibited in expreſſions of ſober grandeur. When Macbeth declines the murder of Duncan, and is charged with puſillanimity by his wife, his reply, which admits the charge, is one of the ſublimeſt thoughts any where to be found :—" I dare " do all that may become a man, who dares do more is none." Thus we ſee this paſſion derives a character from its object or the matter which gives it employment.

THE third circumſtance which I mentioned, as giving the paſſion different modifications, was its degrees; the object may be great and becoming, yet ſuch an exquiſite ſenſibility to this, as might betray the ſuccours of reaſon, and prevent the application of all proper reſources, ceaſes to deſerve our admiration, and by overleaping its proper bounds, falls on the other ſide. The paſſion loſes all dignity of character if it uſurp the place of reaſon where reaſon ought to govern. All extravagance and exceſs ought as far as poſſible to be avoided. The paſſion ſhould rather excite the action, than rebate the vigour of the mind. Upon the whole then it appears that this paſſion, as it may ſometimes be inconſiſtent with the ſublime, may at others be highly favourable to it, and therefore that we muſt underſtand the term φοβος uſed by Longinus in a reſtrained ſenſe. Perhaps we may in general aſſert, that the paſſion uſually called fear ſeldom can be employed in the ſublime, while another modification of the ſame paſſion, terror, might open a very copious ſource, and thus may the great antient and modern critics be reconciled.

THE ſame principles, I imagine, might apply to the paſſion of revenge. Lord Kaims concludes from induction, that dignity

is not a property of any diſagreeable paſſion, and declares himſelf willing to put this to the teſt in the moſt ſpirited picture of revenge ever drawn—It is the ſpeech of Anthony wailing over the body of Cæſar:

> Woe to the hand that ſhed this coſtly blood!
> Over thy wounds now do I propheſy,
> Which, like dumb mouths, do ope their ruby lips,
> To beg the voice and utt'rance of my tongue;
> A curſe ſhall light upon the limbs of men,
> Domeſtic fury and fierce civil ſtrife
> Shall cumber all the parts of Italy:
> Blood and deſtruction ſhall be ſo in uſe,
> And dreadful objects ſo familiar,
> That mothers ſhall but ſmile when they behold
> Their infants quarter'd with the hands of war:
> All pity choak'd with cuſtom of fell deeds;
> And Cæſar's ſpirit, raging for revenge,
> With Até by his ſide, come hot from Hell,
> Shall in theſe confines, with a monarch's voice,
> Cry havoc, and let ſlip the dogs of war.

I ESTEEM moſt parts of this paſſage truly ſublime; but this being a matter of taſte and feeling, it may be difficult to determine the queſtion. However, I cannot admit his general poſition. The paſſion of revenge (if we abſtract from the rules of our meek and holy religion) ſeems capable on many occaſions of riſing into dignity. Among ſome nations it is eſteemed the moſt exalted virtue—Zanga calls his countrymen children of the ſun, with whom revenge is virtue. I am of opinion that wherever the paſſion is held neceſſary for the vindication of honour, or for the ſupport of any other admired virtue, it might very ſucceſsfully

ceſsfully be employed in ſublime compoſition. Diſdain ſeems another of thoſe diſagreeable paſſions which may ſometimes lay claim to dignity. I aſk whether the ſilent expreſſion of this paſſion from Ajax toward Ulyſſes, upon his deſcent into Hell, be not truly great and ſublime? If it be not, I am at a loſs to know what is. Envy and malice indeed ſeem to be under every modification unſuitable to the ſublime. A mind addicted to theſe malignant paſſions is incapable of all true dignity. There is ſomething ſo vile and abject in them, that however forcible and pointed their natural expreſſion might be, we cannot conceive it to approach in any degree to a ſublime form. The character of Shylock is drawn with admirable force, but no where affects ſublimity.

Let us apply our principles to ſome other paſſions. Grief and pity have for their objects the calamities of ourſelves and others. Theſe paſſions ſeem to have a natural tendency to weaken and depreſs the mind. It is their diſpoſition to gratify themſelves, and to dwell with a melancholy pleaſure on their object; and thus by at once relaxing the vigour of the mind, and confining its views and affections, they are apt to prevent all elevation and expanſion. The ſubject matter which employs them being moſt commonly the ordinary incidents of human life, are therefore unfit to raiſe aſtoniſhment, or any emotions kindred to the ſublime. Every day's acquaintance with the world diſcovers them to be the common lot of humanity, and therefore the mind ought to meet them in ſome degree prepared. The full extent of the evil being known, the agitation of the mind is of courſe leſs than when it is under the impreſſion of terror, which is apt to magnify its object, and in ſo

doing has a turn to the ſublime. Theſe paſſions alſo might be ſaid in ſome ſort to magnify their object; but they do ſo in a manner very unfavourable to the ſublime, by throwing round it all the tender and minute circumſtances which formerly accompanied and endeared the object. I am for theſe reaſons inclined to think theſe paſſions to be for the moſt part unfit for ſublime expreſſion. The funeral oration of Anthony over Cæſar's dead body, ſo wonderfully calculated to raiſe emotions of grief and pity, in the following lines, I confeſs appears to me ſublime:

> For when the noble Cæſar ſaw him ſtab,
> Ingratitude, more ſtrong than traitor's arms,
> Quite vanquiſh'd him.—Then burſt his mighty heart;
> And in his mantle muffling up his face,
> Even at the baſe of Pompey's ſtatue,
> Which all the while ran blood, great Cæſar fell.

But the ſublimity of this paſſage does not, perhaps, ſo much depend upon the pathetic emotions of the ſpeaker, as upon the noble character of Cæſar, ſo finely drawn, fighting againſt an hoſt of traitors, yet ſinking at the ſight of his beloved friend; and above all, upon the great and affecting image conveyed in the two laſt lines, by which this eloquent ſpeaker hath contrived moſt forcibly to mark the horrid deed, and to reflect a ſuperior luſtre on the departed hero, in thus making the inanimate ſtatue of his rival ſhed drops of blood for his fall.

There is another very fine picture of grief, where Satan is introduced by Milton, after having eſcaped from Hell, addreſſing the ſun, and recalling to mind the circumſtances of his own loſt glory and happineſs. The paſſage is too long for quotation, but

but may be found in the fourth book of Paradiſe Loſt. Several paſſions are moved in that pathetic addreſs; yet if we attend carefully to ſuch parts of it as are the pure and unmixed expreſſions of grief, I think the emotions excited have very little analogy to the ſublime. However grand and terrible the Being, and of courſe well adapted to raiſe awful and ſublime ideas, we naturally ſoften into pity; his grief degrades him from the loftineſs of his pride, and places him in ſome ſort upon our own level; and we ſo far ſympathize with him, as for ſome moments to forget his infernal character.

THE compaſſion of our Lord over Jeruſalem muſt be acknowledged to be truly ſublime:—"O Jeruſalem, Jeruſalem, which "killeſt the prophets, and ſtoneſt them that are ſent unto thee, "how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a "hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would "not!" And in another place the expreſſion of his pity is no leſs ſublime:—"And when he was come near, he beheld the "city, and wept over it, ſaying, If thou hadſt known, even "thou, at leaſt in this thy day, the things which belong unto "thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes." Such exceptions, however, being entirely out of the ordinary courſe of events, and inapplicable to any general principles, by no means invalidate, but ſeem rather to confirm the theory.

I MUST beg leave to recur here to an obſervation which I had occaſion to make ſome time ago, reſpecting the exceſſes of the paſſion of fear. I would there be underſtood to mean ſuch exceſſes as the mind falls into without diſplaying any reaſonable conflict, and which betray rather imbecillity than

violent emotion; for there are exceſſes I believe of almoſt every paſſion, which are ſometimes occaſions of the ſublime. Such a degree of pathos as exhibits vehement, uncommon and aſtoniſhing agitations, and almoſt runs out into madneſs, whatever be the efficient cauſe, however refined or tender it might be thought, when abſtracted from ſuch effects, appears ſometimes in a ſublime form. The mind thus agitated often ſtrikes out great and forcible images, or pours itſelf forth in ſtrong and glowing language. Almoſt all the paſſions, if carried to exceſs, naturally fall into the uſe of the proſopopæia, one of the boldeſt figures of ſpeech, and ſublimeſt expreſſions of paſſion. In caſes like theſe nothing ſeems attended to but the effects themſelves. The imagination is too ſtrongly impreſſed and too deeply intereſted to trace them up to their cauſes. So that if they be of ſuch a nature as to excite emotions of terror, or if they be ſigns of ſome great exertion of force and power, or have a ſtriking analogy to any other form or ſource of the ſublime, they do not loſe their character by a relation to their efficient cauſe. Perhaps we ſhould for the moſt part except pity on ſuch occaſions, which ſeems not well ſuited to vehement expreſſion. This paſſion may be conſidered as the handmaid of grief, attending it through all its ſofter movements, but unable to follow in any extravagant exceſſes, and under theſe circumſtances generally loſt in ſilent contemplation. Even grief itſelf ſeems leſs liable to theſe violent agitations than moſt other paſſions, and ſeldom appears in ſo diſturbed a form, except in minds naturally weak and tender; and it ſhould be obſerved, that in caſes of this nature the character of the ſufferer gives a ſoft and delicate ſhade to the paſſion, however vehement, and ſo in a great meaſure defeats the ſublime effect. The grief of Belvidera could not

not well be deſcribed in ſo ſublime characters as that of Othello. The grief of Conſtance has a ſtronger claim to ſublimity: In her we contemplate not the character of the woman diſſolved in all the tenderneſs of paſſion, but the glowing affection of the mother, exalted by the dignity of the queen.

Dr. Blair, in his Lectures on this ſubject, acknowledges the pathetic in ſome inſtances to be a proper ſource of the ſublime. It were to be wiſhed that he had in ſome manner defined thoſe inſtances; but this matter he has left entirely at large, and contents himſelf with pronouncing againſt the judgment of Longinus, that Sappho's Ode contains nothing of the ſublime, although it will generally be allowed highly pathetic. Had he thought fit to take this part of the ſubject in hand, the reflections with which I have troubled the Academy I ſhould probably have deemed unneceſſary. Upon Sappho's Ode I will not venture to give any decided opinion—I ſhall only endeavour to apply the principles already advanced to this queſtion, as far as they ſeem either to ſupport or oppoſe the opinion of Longinus.

The great critic introduces the ode with this critical obſervation, "that of neceſſity it muſt be a great cauſe of the "ſublime to ſelect the principal circumſtances which riſe out "of the ſubject, and by their compoſition to form one entire "body; both which excellencies are found in this Ode." And he ſubjoins to them a more particular account of the nature of thoſe circumſtances:—"Do you not wonder," ſays he, "how at the ſame inſtant her ſoul, her body, her voice, her "ears, her eyes, her colour, all ſeem utterly loſt to her! How

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" by contraries ſhe freezes and burns, ſhe raves and is ſober,
" ſhe trembles and almoſt expires; ſo that not a ſingle paſſion,
" but a combination of them, ſeems to overwhelm her."

Dr. Blair admits that ſtrength of deſcription, a neceſſary requiſite to the ſublime, depends upon a proper choice of circumſtances. The only queſtion then in the preſent caſe is, whether the circumſtances are capable by any management of cauſing ſublime emotions; for if they be, it will hardly be doubted that they are well choſen and happily combined. We have here a moſt pathetic deſcription of certain violent affections, the effects of a paſſion as arbitrary and deſpotic in ſwaying the human heart, as it is univerſal in its influence: The moſt exalted hero bows to its ſovereign dominion. There being, therefore, no meanneſs nor weakneſs of mind in becoming its ſubject, ſo far there ſeems to be nothing unfavourable to the ſublime, particularly when its effects are vehement and aſtoniſhing, full of pain and terror. We ſhould alſo conſider theſe emotions to be wrought in a great degree by jealouſy, a paſſion which by its extreme agitation is likely to ſtrike out bold and forcible expreſſions. The human frame, agitated and convulſed almoſt to diſſolution by the mixed paſſions of love and jealouſy and deſpair, is an object well adapted to excite ſtrong ſympathetic emotions, and to fill the mind with alarming ideas of the deſolating fury of theſe paſſions. For the moſt part, indeed, love is conſidered as a tender and refined paſſion, and as bearing a cloſer analogy to beauty, its natural foundation, than to ſublimity. The ſentiment is generally true; yet as there is nothing in the nature of the paſſion humiliating or unworthy of true magnanimity, as it frequently gives the mind a generous and exalted turn, and

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is at the ſame time capable of producing the moſt vehement emotions, it ſeems to me in many inſtances capable of ſublime deſcription. Should Sappho's Ode notwithſtanding be thought deficient in ſublimity, ſome reaſons might be aſſigned for this, conſiſtent with the principles already laid down. The opening of this Ode ſeems too beautiful to convey any idea of a ſoul violently agitated; it deſcribes the charms of the beloved object, and makes theſe the ground of thoſe vehement emotions which break out in the following part. The tranſition is not ſtrongly marked, nor of courſe are the former impreſſions entirely done away. But what I take to be leaſt congenial to the ſublime is the character of the ſubject, who is of ſo tender and delicate a nature, that we do not look for any vigorous effort of reſiſtance, but on the contrary are led to ſuppoſe that the ſoul hath been fondly ſurrendered to the influence of the paſſion. The ſame ſentiments, I believe, coming from a firm and reſolute heart, which had long ſtruggled in vain againſt the uncontroulable ſtrength of paſſion, might perhaps excite emotions kindred to the ſublime. No paſſion can be conſidered as wholly abſtracted from the ſubject in which it is found, and the ſubject muſt conſequently have a powerful effect in deciding the character of the paſſion. In the character of Othello, which is that of a generous warrior, the paſſion is deſcribed in its various ſtages and progreſs, from the moſt abſolute content to the laſt fatal exceſſes of jealouſy and deſpair. Some of thoſe paſſages may I think be called ſublime:

It gives me wonder great as my content
To ſee you here before me. Oh, my ſoul's joy!
If after ev'ry tempeſt come ſuch calms,
May the winds blow 'till they have waken'd death:
And let the labouring bark climb hills of ſeas
Olympus high, and duck again as low
As Hell's from Heaven.

In this fine ſpeech the tranſport of his paſſion ſwells his ſoul, and pours itſelf forth in ſplendid and glowing expreſſions.

When his jealouſy ſeems to have gained the aſcendant over his love, nothing can be more ſublime as well as pathetic than the ſentiments which it draws forth:

Oh, now for ever
Farewell the tranquil mind, farewell content,
Farewell the plumed troops, and the big war
That makes ambition virtue. Oh, farewell!

In the ſcene where he murders Deſdemona we may diſcover how cloſe an affinity there is between the pathetic and the ſublime:

Yes, 'tis Æmilia.—By and by.—She's dead.
'Tis like ſhe comes to ſpeak of Caſſio's death.—
The noiſe was nigh.—Ha! no more moving!
Still as the grave!—Shall ſhe come in? Wer't good?
I think ſhe ſtirs again—No.—What's beſt?
If ſhe come in, ſhe'll ſure ſpeak to my wife!
My wife! My wife! I have no wife!
Oh inſupportable! Oh heavy hour!
Methinks it ſhould be now a huge eclipſe
Of ſun and moon; and that th' affrighted globe
Should yawn at alteration.

THE principles hitherto laid down may ſerve in ſome degree to ſhew the connection between the pathetic and ſublime, ſo far as the deſcription and expreſſion of the ſeveral paſſions are concerned. Another copious ſource of the ſublime may be laid open in the government and controul of the paſſions, which may poſſibly be the ſubject of a future eſſay.

I WAS induced to give attention to the ſubject before us from having read ſome ſtrictures made upon Longinus by Dr. Blair, in my opinion without ſufficient foundation. To vindicate the great critic was my firſt deſign; but yet finding no principles to which we might reſort for determining the connection in any caſe whatſoever between the pathetic and ſublime, I have offered you ſuch reflections on this matter as aroſe in my own mind. Having done ſo, I will now briefly examine thoſe ſtrictures by Dr. Blair.

HE aſſerts that Longinus has made a falſe diviſion of his ſubject; for that of the five ſources of the ſublime which he has laid open, the three laſt have perhaps leſs relation to the ſublime than to any other ſpecies of good writing, becauſe it requires leſs the aſſiſtance of ornament; and he calls this plan rather a treatiſe of rhetoric than of the ſublime. This ſeems to me too ſummary a way of deciding upon the merit of a work which has received the ſanction of learning and taſte in all ages. Such a criticiſm ought to have been ſupported by ſome argument, and not advanced in its preſent undigeſted form. To me it appears materially defective, both becauſe Dr. Blair has miſconceived, or at leaſt improperly expreſſed, the great author's

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meaning; and alſo becauſe, even admitting the three laſt ſources to have no peculiar relation to the ſublime, yet if they be capital conſtituents of this as well as other ſpecies of writing (which I hope preſently to ſhew) they have certainly an eſſential part in a complete treatiſe on the ſubject.

I SAY then that Dr. Blair has miſconceived, or at leaſt improperly expreſſed, the great critic's meaning. The fifth ſource of the ſublime mentioned by Longinus is in theſe words, εν αξιωματι και διαρσει συνθεσις, or compoſition with ſuitable dignity and elevation. Longinus, indeed, treating of this part of his ſubject, ſometimes appears to explain it by the terms ρυθμος and αρμονια; by which we are to underſtand ſuch a collocation of the ſeveral parts, both words and ſentences, as may ſerve to give the ſublime matter its fulleſt effect. And this idea, even if nothing further were intended, is ſurely very different from Dr. Blair's tranſlation of the paſſage, "muſical ſtruc-" ture and arrangement," which in my opinion ſuggeſts to every reader nothing more than the meaſured cadence of elaborate periods and well-tuned ſentences. The tranſlation indeed is not peculiarly related to the ſublime, perhaps leſs than to any other ſpecies of good writing; for the ſublime diſdains ſuch tinſel ornament. But the great critic himſelf meant not ſuch an arragement as pleaſes the ear, but ſupports the thought. And hence we find him beſtowing the higheſt commendation on this ſource, as compriſing and giving completion to every other excellence. He preſuppoſes a proper ſelection of words proportioned to the thoughts, and then requires that the ſound may in ſome ſort be an echo to the ſenſe. And has not this been

been a law rather of nature than of artificial criticiſm to the ſublimeſt writers in the world? Can there be a doubt that the ſame conception ſhall have different effects, according as the language in which it is clothed is mean or grand, and as the arrangement is weak, vague and ſpiritleſs, or cloſe, ſtrong and animated? An idea naturally ſublime might not perhaps loſe its whole ſublimity under the moſt wretched diſguiſe, yet it cannot be denied that ſuch a diſguiſe would conſiderably impair its grandeur; and therefore the precepts given under the heads of diction and arrangement are of material import. Nor do they ſeem leſs neceſſary to ſublime compoſition than to any other ſpecies of good writing: It is the perfection of human genius; and every circumſtance which can heighten or obſcure its glory becomes of intereſting moment. Where Majeſty appears, we expect to find a ſuitable pomp and dignity ſurround the throne. A ſingle example may ſerve to illuſtrate what has been advanced: Let it be taken from that ſublime paſſage in the 6th book of Milton, where the Son of God is deſcribed coming forth in his chariot againſt the rebel angels:

Under his burning wheels
The ſtedfaſt Empyrean ſhook throughout,
All but the throne itſelf of God.

See now how the great ſublime of this paſſage will ſink, though we ſhould preſerve the thought, and make little other change beſide in the arrangement:

Except the throne of God,
All the firm Heav'n beneath his heated wheels
Did ſhake throughout.

If further proof were neceſſary, I would only deſire any man to attempt ſome other form of expreſſion for that divine paſſage of Homer reſpecting Pluto's terror, δ' εκ θρονε αλτο και ιαχε. He will then perhaps be ſenſible that there is a ſecret virtue and powerful charm in language and arrangement.

The uſe of figures is perhaps of more importance than either of the precepts which we have been juſt conſidering, for they affect rather the matter than the form of compoſition.

Nothing ſeems more finely calculated to produce ſublime effects than the invention and application of bold and ſtriking figures. Dr. Blair tells us that "it is not by hunting after "tropes and figures we can expect to produce the ſublime." The laboured and affected uſe of ſuch ornaments I admit to be improper; but then we ſhould conſider that figurative language is the natural language of the paſſions, and of courſe might be neceſſarily required and happily employed in caſes where the pathetic riſes into the ſublime. And for this cauſe the mind ſhould be ſtored with a copious variety of images and figures; for when the imagination or the paſſions are once heated, they will naturally ſtrike out ſuch as are moſt appropriate to the ſubject. Longinus, I think, demonſtrates that figures and ſublimity impart a reciprocal aid; or in other words, the ſublime matter is heightened by the invention of bold figures, and figures in their turn acquire force and grandeur from their connection with the ſublime. I am the more ſurprized at Dr. Blair's rejecting this ſource, as Longinus has exemplified its noble effects in more inſtances than one. For this purpoſe he has introduced

troduced the celebrated apoſtrophe of Demoſthenes in his oration for the crown. The obvious uſe, ſays the critic, to be made of the battle of Marathon, to his countrymen, was this: You have not erred, for thoſe who fought at Marathon were an example to you. Inſtead of this cold and lifeleſs reaſoning, he ſwears "by the manes of thoſe who died at Marathon;" thus deifying the heroes of his country, rouſing in them a ſenſe of national glory, and carrying his hearers along with him from the preſent gloomy ſcene, in a ſtrain of bold and pathetic eloquence. Longinus himſelf too illuſtrates the ſame point by his own great example. Speaking of Homer's genius in the Odyſſey, he compares him to the ſetting ſun, whoſe grandeur remains without his fire. And again he ſays, that like the ocean retiring within itſelf, ſo do the ebbings of ſublime genius appear even in his fabulous and incredible wanderings. I am ſo far from ſubſcribing to Dr. Blair's aſſertion, that figures have no relation to the ſublime, that I think ſome of them peculiarly adapted to this mode of compoſition. Of theſe I ſhall mention two, the climax and proſopopæia. It ſeems to me that if the ſeveral circumſtances of a climax be well choſen and judiciouſly diſpoſed, it has a direct tendency this way. The thought itſelf ſhould certainly be grand, and the parts of proportionable ſtrength and greatneſs; yet if their order be not natural, but expoſe the mind to alternate fits of contraction and expanſion, the whole effect will be greatly impaired: Whereas by a regular ſwell and majeſtic aſcent, new matter of wonder and delight is continually ſupplied, and the mind becomes at laſt ſo filled with the thought, as not to have room for the admiſſion of more. The following awful paſſage of Shakeſpeare is perfectly of this kind:

The cloud-capt towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The ſolemn temples, the great globe itſelf,
Yea all which it inherit, ſhall diſſolve,
And like this inſubſtantial pageant faded,
Leave not a wreck behind.

THE whole of this grand thought may be thus ſhortly and proſaically expreſſed:—" The earth, with every work of art and " nature which it contains, ſhall in time be annihilated." Yet who can be dull enough to maintain this fundamental thought to be of equal ſublimity with the figure. Dr. Blair will perhaps call this a proper ſelection of circumſtances; but this is not its entire excellence, and if it were, his criticiſm would be merely a play upon words, for it is univerſally accounted among the figures of ſpeech.

To prove the ſublime effect of the proſopopæia I ſhall ſelect two inſtances. The firſt may be found in Biſhop Sherlock's Sermons:—" How deſpitefully do we treat the Goſpel of Chriſt, " to which we owe that clear light which we now enjoy, " when we endeavour to ſet up reaſon and nature in oppoſition " to it. Ought *the withered hand*, which Chriſt has reſtored and " made whole, to be lifted up againſt him? Or ought the *dumb* " *man's tongue*, juſt looſened from the bonds of ſilence, to blaſ- " pheme the power that ſet it free?" The ground of this moſt eloquent paſſage is the ingratitude of modern infidelity, in employing thoſe advantages of light and knowledge which reaſon has derived from revelation againſt the intereſts of the Goſpel. But is there any man of feeling upon earth who thinks the abſtract ſentiment approaches in any degree to the ſublimity of the figurative form? Perhaps it may not be thought refining too

too much here to obſerve, that of the two fine figures juſt mentioned, the withered hand has the ſuperior excellence. Two reaſons I think can be aſſigned for this; firſt, becauſe it is further removed from the literal ſentiment; and ſecondly, it implies more action, which the mind ever delights in contemplating If this criticiſm be in any degree juſt, it will furniſh an additional proof in favour of bold and ſtriking figures.

The ſecond example of the proſopopæia ſhall be taken from the Prophet Iſaiah, ſpeaking of the fall of Babylon: "Hell from "beneath is moved for thee to meet thee at thy coming. All "they ſhall ſpeak and ſay unto thee, Art thou alſo become "weak as we? Art thou become like unto us? Thy pomp is "brought down to the grave—The worm is ſpread under thee, "and the worms cover thee. How art thou fallen from Hea-"ven, O Lucifer, ſon of the morn!" Nothing can exceed this in ſublimity; yet what is the thought ſtripped of the figure? It is only the deſtruction of Babylon, and the joy of all nations at ſeeing that proud and inſolent tyrant brought low as themſelves.

If it ſhould be thought that I have taken up too much time in my vindication of the great ancient critic, whoſe fame is already eſtabliſhed, let it be conſidered that Dr. Blair's works are held in very general eſteem: His Lectures upon Rhetoric contain much uſeful information; at the ſame time there are to be found in them ſome inſtances of negligence, which we ſhould not expect in a work profeſſing ſo much critical accuracy. I think the preſent is one of thoſe; and I am the more confirmed in my

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opinion, when I conſider the vague manner in which he has expreſſed himſelf on this ſubject:—" If it be aſked," ſays he, " what are the proper ſources of the ſublime? I anſwer, they are " to be found every where in nature." Here, when we look for ſome definite rules for our guidance, our thoughts are thrown looſe upon the world. In truth I cannot ſo far ſee the virtue of this univerſal rule, as to adopt it haſtily, to the excluſion of a great and important part of that admirable work of Longinus; in which, although he ſometimes departs from his original deſign, and adduces inſtances rather of good compoſition at large, yet the principles are for the moſt part in my opinion perfectly juſt, and his illuſtrations of them truly ſublime.